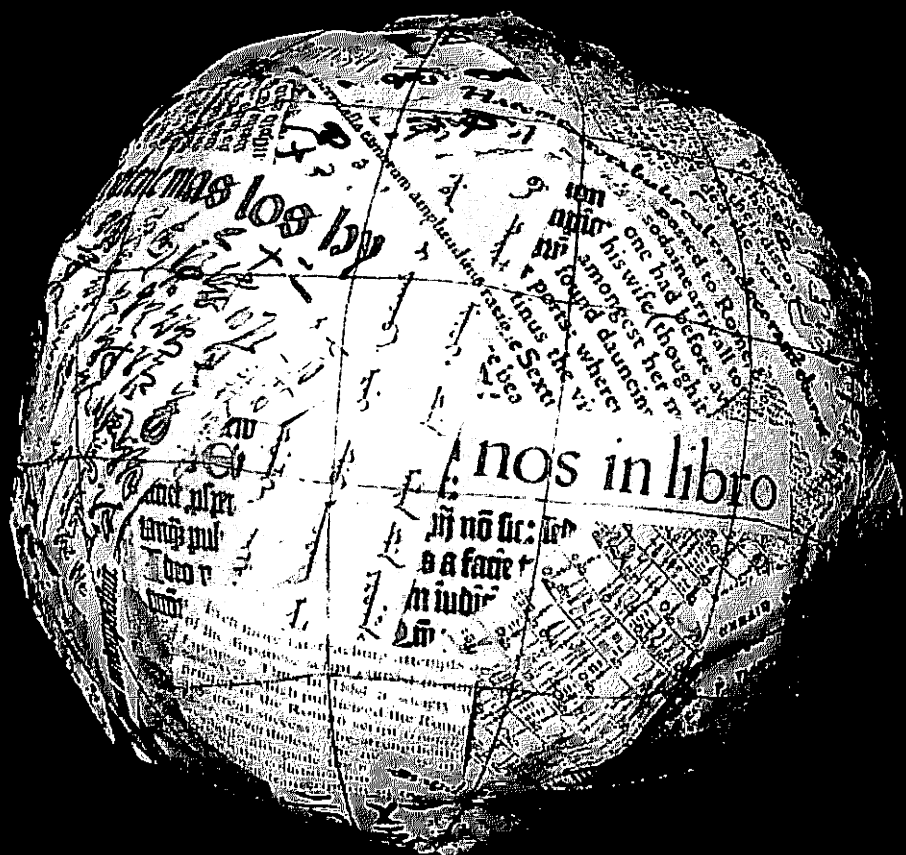


# WATERSHED



# **WATERSHED**

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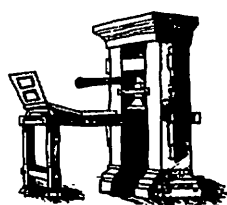
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Special thanks to Gregg Berryman and the students in his CDES 23 class for an exceptional set of cover designs.

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## **Multi-Ethnic, Multi-Cultural Issue**



## Introduction

Writing from an ethnic or multi-ethnic perspective has been enriching the coffers of America's literary legacy increasingly in the last decades. When the editors of *Watershed* decided to advertise for an issue that would feature this perspective and the voices of ethnic writers, it was in part an attempt to see how much material would be forthcoming from this community. We are delighted to have found more than enough material to make an issue which we are proud to present. It has been challenging to edit this issue, and the experience has expanded our understanding of this writing community.

It is our hope that in the future the many and varied voices of our local writers will be reflected in each issue of *Watershed*. This special issue has shown us, and we hope you, too, just how rich the possibilities are.

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## **Rape Report**

He pushed down and tried to force me to give in.  
When I told him he couldn't have what was mine,  
    he used strong-arm tactics on me.  
I fought back, I clawed and screamed  
    and for fighting for my honor,  
    I was punished even more.  
He said, "I am doing you a favor, if you submit,  
    it will be easier on you."  
I knew I was losing ground and then knew  
    it would be less painful for me if I quit fighting.  
He received praise for what he did to me.  
He took something that was sacred and beautiful  
    to me and replaced it with four-letter words.  
I am making this report in English, you see,  
    I've been raped of my native tongue.

*Rita Urias Mendoza*

## **La Comida**

Los niños esperan, callados,  
para el desayuno.  
Pero hay solamente el sol,  
la piedras, el polvo de los campos.  
El corazón del día está caliente  
y imperdonable.  
Las almas de los niños  
son tan secas como hojas.  
Aprenden  
a tener hambre sin llanto.  
Saben  
esperar sin esperanza.

*Betsy McNeill*

## **Food**

The children wait, hushed,  
    for the morning meal.  
But there is only the sun,  
    stones, dust of the fields.  
The heart of day is hot  
    and unforgiving  
The souls of the children  
    are as dry as leaves.  
They learn  
    to be hungry without crying.  
They know how  
    to wait without hope.

*Betsy McNeill*

Translation of "La Comida" by the author.

## **Freedom Ride**

Hey  
Blood  
take  
a  
hip  
trip  
and  
dip  
your  
pride  
into  
the  
stride  
of  
revolution.

*Aldrich M. Patterson, Jr.*

## **The Boy Who Saw the Light**

The year was 1978 and I was just like everybody else in my neighborhood in Lynwood, California. We all were young, confused and wild, but what separated me from them in a whole lot of ways was that I never drank or smoked weed, I never stole nothing from nobody. The older members of the gang would get the younger ones to steal because if they went to jail the police would just call their mothers and let them go home, but if one of the older guys went to jail for stealing they might have to serve some time. If another gang knew that too many of your O.G.'s were in jail they would come into your neighborhood and try to take over, so that's why the younger guys stole and the older ones fought and helped keep peace among the clan.

When I went to my new school in Hawthorne with all the white kids I had a total cultural shock and I couldn't handle it at all. I wasn't use to being the black sheep in the crowd, so I complained to my parents all the time about the white students. I told them that they gave me a hard time. They did give me a hard time, but it wasn't as bad as I made it seem.

In my old neighborhood on the way to school, either somebody was beating up somebody and we all would jump in and help, or somebody was stealing money from somebody. I never did that; it just didn't appeal to me. If you've never seen a big black grease man get his ass kicked by seven hoods from the ages of 13 to 17, it is a sight worth seeing, believe me. At the time nothing felt better than watching someone older, smarter and somewhat meaner get the living daylight's knocked out of them by neighborhood gangsters. Do you see what I mean? It was different there, believe me. All I saw, now, was old people in the morning watering their grass.

After months and months of complaining to my parents I finally got my way. They really didn't want me to be somewhere where I wasn't welcome. I was always taught by my mother to be proud of where I came from, but she also said never let where you live limit you. She said, "Son, I know it is hard being a black man but it is even harder not to fall into that same old mode that society has put black men into, you know what I'm talking about, Chris, don't you?" I just shook my head and said, "Yes mama." I shouldn't have started my mother. Now she's running off on a tangent saying over and over, "Chris, that is why you should know and learn more about your

culture.” Finally my mother left the room. I was so happy that she did because I didn’t want to hear anymore stuff about my so-called roots; I wasn’t Alex Hailey. I didn’t care about the past; the future—what my homeboys wanted for the gang was my only concern.

So my mother finally let me go back to school with my homies, but I found out that they really wasn’t my homies anymore. When I went back to my old school, I saw all the old homies and everybody was happy to see me, and when I started my classes I was doing much better on my school work. For a while at least I started speaking up in class. But in all good there’s bound to be some bad somewhere along the line. People started calling me the “little rich kid,” just because I didn’t live in the inner city any more and even though we weren’t rich, we were not poor either. A lot of people that have lots of money choose to stay in the inner city because they feel comfortable. All of that bad talk brought me a lot of problems. I had to start proving to all my classmates and friends that I was just as wild a they were. I would be tested often. My cousin was called Sir Luck; they called me Little Luck. My cousin thought that he had to prove to the other members that I was still tuff, so he had someone pick a fight with me just to see if I still had heart. If I was weak that was a total reflection on my cousin’s manhood as well because we were from the same family.

By me living in Hawthorne and going to school in Lynwood I had to work twice as hard to be tuff at school. Even though I loved to fight I did not love beating people up for no reason at all. Have you ever heard the saying “only the strong will survive?” Believe me in the inner city it is as simple as that. We all considered being in some kind of gang. It is not as bad as the media makes it seem. Believe me! Only on Miami Vice is the bad guy truly the bad guy. In the ghetto, to so many kids who have nothing and nobody, a gang leader can easily be his hero. The bad guys have money, brains, and what everybody wants: respect.

Fights started to bring about a rise of gang warfare in the hood. Those changes affected me in a much deeper way than just by my fist. When the day was over I had to get on the bus and go home; the rest of the guys still stayed in that neighborhood, but I did not. Hawthorne wasn’t just a bus ride away from Lynwood, it was a life away. When I would be at home I couldn’t stand still; I had to be moving all the time and that worried me.

I had white friends in my parents’ neighborhood and they use to always ask me, why do you go to school with all those hoods? And I would say, because I’m a hood, a neighborhood gangster from the wood. When people at my school would ask me if I had white friends,

I would say no because it would be taken wrong; to some it might mean a sign of weakness or to some it might mean that I was selling out. Besides, I wasn't sure how I could handle it. I started finding it extremely hard to deal with both worlds, so I chose the stronger out of the two and that one was the wrong one.

I came home with a black eye one day. My mother did not say anything, but I could tell she was worried. I found it strange because in my cousin's neighborhood people thought that it was just a sign of manhood to have a few cuts and gashes.

One day I met this old white lady that lived own the street from me. She told me that she knew of me and that I couldn't have been as bad as everybody made me. She also said that I wasn't what she thought a gangster would be. I turned my head and said, "don't believe the hype." I looked at her dead in the eye and smiled. Then she turned away from me for a minute, turned right back around and started right back talking. She kept saying to me over and over, "what do you have to gain by doing what you do?" I opened my mouth wide, ready to call her all kinds of names, but I didn't.

The old lady couldn't have weighed more than 98 pounds, but that didn't matter to her. She still said what she wanted me to know and that was that respect wasn't nothing without loyalty. I looked at her and said in a nasty way, "that is the difference between the inner city and where you live. In the inner city you have to take respect and never let it go until somebody takes it from you." The old lady kept telling me I was wrong and that I was a good kid at heart, but I just had things mixed up. As she talked, her voice became lighter and lighter until you could barely hear what she was saying. But her last few words that I could understand was that I should learn how to lead my life with my heart instead of with my mean thoughts. Her words crackling soft in my mind never went away; even though I tried to just laugh it off inside, I couldn't.

One morning I woke up extra early so I could talk to my mother about giving me more lunch money; I thought that two dollars a day was not enough. But little did I know, my mother wanted to talk to me, too. I walked into her room and said, "Mama." She turned around with a mean look on her face and she started to cry. I walked towards her and all of a sudden she slapped me dead in the face. My eyes opened up wide because my mother had never hit me before, she didn't even scream; she just talked and talked—she talked for the longest time. I guess that is why it stuck so deep in my big head, because she talked to me as you would an adult. That night my homie boy, Brandon, called me and said, "Everybody is looking for you;

somebody shot little Capone." "What!" I screamed out over the telephone. I asked Brandon what was up with that, what was the gang going to do, and he came back quick saying, "We are going to kill at least three or four of their homies." That next day at school everybody was hyped up about that other gang shooting Little Capone. The fight took place sometime after school; everybody was going to be there. I wasn't scared, but something inside me told me that it just wasn't right for me anymore, even though Little Capone was my friend as well. I just did not want to fight. It was hard to say it even to myself; the gang had just that kind of hold on me. There's a saying, do or die that means to do what you can for the gang or die like a punk. I had kept respect among the leaders and everybody from the gang, so if I said I didn't want to fight, it would be taken as a major issue.

The hours went by slowly. Every ten minutes I had to use the restroom. That was the first time I ever had to shit that much before a gang fight. That had me worried because that was a sign of weakness. Something was wrong. I knew it, my brain knew it, but my heart wasn't down with the neighborhood gangsters anymore. It was almost time to go to the fight, and what the old lady and what my mother said kept ringing in my head.

It was time to leave to go to the fight and for the first time in my life I wasn't ready. Everybody was over at my cousin's house ready to walk out the door, but I wasn't. I turned to my cousin who was one of the leaders at the time and said, "Lucky, Lucky, I'm not down with the gang no more." He turned around and looked at the other guys, then he turned to me because he knew I was serious and said, "Punk you ain't shit." He grabbed me and said, "Punk you're just a mark." This had been the person that I had admired since I was very young. I watched him turn on me like a snake. That hurt. I knew inside that he was going to hit me. I knew deep down he still loved me, but I had gone against of the rules and I had to feel the wrath of the neighborhood gangster for that. All of a sudden my cousin told the whole posse that I was no longer down with them and I had to be dealt with. As soon as my cousin said that, I swung and hit him dead in the eye. He came back with quick blows, but I kept coming back too with blows. I could tell that he really didn't want to do it, but he did. We fought for about three or four minutes, and when you're fighting someone bigger and stronger than you are, it seems like a real long time. My cousin kicked me in my stomach; I fell to the ground. He yelled out "Neighborhood gangster get some," and before I could get up there were about 15 to 20 guys beating me up. After a while of feeling much pain it didn't even hurt no more, but when they finally



got through I had a broken arm, my hands were bleeding as well as my nose and teeth; my back felt like someone had swung a baseball bat against it for about an hour, but what hurt the most out of all of that was my pride. I had lost all my respect among the homies. When they finally did let me up, they shook my hands and said, "Leave now before we have to do a do or die move on you, home boy." As they said that, I turned my head, never looking back, because even though I wasn't in the gang any more, if I would have turned around to look they would have taken it as me being scared of them.

I knew that I couldn't go back to Lynwood any more, so I went back to the school that I should have gone to in the first place: the school right down the street from my parents' house. It was real hard adjusting to the new system, but I knew it was the right thing for me. I'm glad that I did not fight that day because I found out later that 12 of my homies got shot in that little gang war. If I had been there, I could have been one of the 12 guys hurt by the bullets. Instead I only got my pride taken away for a while. I guess my Lord Jesus Christ must have meant for me to be doing something else besides gang bang.

*Herman Leon Frazier Jr.*

## Avó

Tongue towards the saucer, she sips noisy the pale brown  
cream, sugar, and coffee, always a child in her lap  
afghan pulled up, rocking into another sleepless winter night  
another story, the favorites about the warm sun and oranges  
tropical to touch . . . a stage midtown and dozens of cousins  
playing in plays

Figuero de Serra at the foot of the mountain  
as a child I could feel the giant, jolly and green, in me  
watching her tell about the town at the foot of the mountain  
the shoemakers, the farmers, and the little girl with a fungus  
on her back and how the old women knew, when the doctors didn't  
to pick the leaves of just that tree, no other, and brew a tea  
a medicine to pour and heal

I made her take me back at night, made her let me ride piggy-back  
at night she was mine and did what I said, read the stories  
I liked about the elephant who loses his mommy, forgetting  
to hang on to her tail, stories of narrow old tailors  
and horses, like Parsley, who eat every hat in town  
The child asleep, she hums in a minor key, a fado  
sad, full . . . dreaming of festas, of planting favas and garlic.

*Suzanne Lucas Meyer*

Avó is the Portuguese word for grandmother.

## **So The World Comes To My Door Here**

**So the world comes to my door here.** In the form of the tiny Indian woman who assertively enters my door with her ten year old son, seven year old Cedar opening the door as I rapidly slip on my clothes, having just stepped out of my bath heated by the corncob-fired water heater, my hair still pinned up, squatting around the basket while she straightens her black rebozo, lifts the cloth like a sacrament, revealing her handcrafts, the candleholders resembling camels, birds, fanciful creatures whose resemblance to life is tenuous—uneven, handmade globs of clay.

My countenance not encouraging, she digs further into her basket, comes up with a two-headed creature carved from basalt, reminiscent of figures from temple ruins, calm and pleasant faces of the gods—all mine for un mil ( 1,000 pesos—about sixty-six cents). I purchase and receive a handshake that consists of not only the traditional but includes a thumbclasp at the end. She insists that her son shake my hand also, showing him the proper motions.

She asks if I have work for her or for her husband. Her niña needs shoes in order to attend school, which in Mexico is free through the sixth grade. Cedar disappears into her closet, emerging with the very expensive leather shoes given her by her sister, hands them over without a word. The transaction stands.

This Indian woman, my age, perhaps a few years older (it's hard to tell, they age so fast, childbearing year after year; day in, day out of backbreaking toil, for their families, for the middle and upper class Mexicans, the gringos, earning a few pesos to buy another can of powdered milk, debilitated by parasites they cannot afford to have treated, most of them unable to read or write but their children are being taught).

The ones who can get shoes on their children's feet, uniforms on their backs and books in their hands are being taught to read and write and that is the beginning of revolution, peaceful or violent. There is much anger at the intense poverty of these people which only gets worse as

their meager wages do not keep pace with inflation (five hundred pesos an hour is minimum wage here—about thirty-three cents) and the belt only tightens so far.

The world comes to my door here like the old Indian man, smile wrinkles around eyes shadowed by the tattered sombrero, sparse grey whiskers at the corners of his mouth, who seems to be enjoying some private joke as he motions toward the bag of dirt he has left on the bank opposite my door, good black earth which I roll between my thumb and finger, feeling its richness, this gift from the earth.

The next time he comes, my gringo friend Kurt is there. The old man has brought me a perfect little rose bush—two pink roses, one in full bloom (its fragrance reaches me even from his hands) and a perfect pink rosebud. I think of how Cedar was with me when he first came—how this gift reflects his first perception of us—and I am complimented. Kurt, however, is in a haggling mood. The old man wants un mil (1,000 pesos). Kurt says this is too much and that the old man's plants usually die, anyway. This is contrary to my impression of the old man who seems good-natured and mysterious (a teacher, perhaps); yet, I go along with my gringo kind.

We offer less. He is firm. He has five children to support. (Later, I learn he has no family). Kurt tells him that I, too, have children. No muchos pesos, Señor. We are playing the bartering game yet I sense Kurt's seriousness and I am ashamed.

We each end up giving the old man five hundred pesos. The haggling has ruined the perfection of the gift for me. I am worried that I have offended the old man. I brood for days about this, hoping he will come back, determined I will ask him for flores azul (blue flowers) when I see him next.

He does not come. Then, one night I return from El Centro to find another bolsa of earth on my back step. The roses have faded, the petals have been dried and used as sachet in Cedar's drawer; the bush is vibrant in its new pot. I am disappointed that he has come at a time when I cannot ask for flores azul—cool blue in this intense heat; yet, he has come—which promises well for the future.

Today, another Indian woman comes to my door. Younger, thread-bare, a dirty niña in tow. She carries two baby birds, wanting to sell

them, she says, to buy a new dress for her child. I refuse this time.

I could buy the birds and set them free but they are too young to survive. I could give the woman money for a dress for her child but, on the other hand, saving my money for true emergencies seems wiser. Like yesterday, the woman with bad teeth and the bright pink rebozo who asked sincerely, it seemed, for help obtaining a doctor for her mother, eighty years old.

The two of them are alone, no husbands, no children. They have lived together for a very long time in a very small hut. When they sleep there is only two feet separating their beds. Now the old woman is ill. She needs a consultario y medico.

I give the woman cinco mil (5,000 pesos) which is all I can afford out of my small budget. She asks for un quatro mil more, pressing her luck. Dos mil for a shot in one hip, dos mil for a shot in the other. She does a charade for me, presenting first one buttock then the other. When I refuse, she clasps my hands in her own, hot to the touch, rolls her eyes heavenward, tells me I will, indeed, be rewarded in the hereafter.

The woman with the birds haunts me. She reminds me of a story told at La Fragua, a bar popular with the gringos. A story told to me by a young couple, Ted and Elana. Ted is U.S. born; Elana, Mexican born.

Ted and Elana met in southern California. They were both working in the lettuce fields. Everyone, especially Ted's parents, thought he must be mentally disturbed to be working in the lettuce fields when he has a college education. Ted says that he just likes hard work—that's what he was doing there.

Ted ended up getting fired from his job. He didn't quite fit in with the Mexican workers (they, too, thought he was crazy to be working in the fields) and it disturbed the bosses too much to have a gringo, better educated than themselves, working under migrant conditions; besides, nobody liked the fact that Elana and Ted had fallen in love across cultural barriers. So, Ted got fired and eloped to Mexico with Elana.

Ted and Elana often make trips to the mountains north of San Miguel. Here the Indians sell birds along the road. It is their main livelihood.

They sell baby golden eagles, peregrine falcons and horned owls—all too young to fly away and many too young to survive.

Each year it gets harder to find the baby birds, yet they either do not realize that they are causing the extinction of these birds or they are living only for the present and the pesos it brings. (I believe the latter to be true as it is consistent with day to day survival which is the only way so many of the Indians can afford to think).

Every time Ted and Elana used to go north, they bought birds and nursed them until they either died or were old enough to set free. Sometimes they would open the cage door and the bird, sensing that something was different, would not come forward as usual. Like a prisoner used to captivity and afraid of the outside world, the bird would withdraw to a corner of the cage, refusing freedom.

Last time, when Ted and Elana set their birds free, the birds flew from their hands, one by one, to a nearby power transformer where they fried, falling to the ground. Ted believes the birds, two peregrine falcons and a horned owl, committed suicide, mentally ill birds, so to speak. Ted and Elana have decided two years of this is enough. They will not go back to buy more birds.

When they were among the Indians, they heard a story about how the Indians got started in this work. The Indians have always caught a few birds and sold them along the highway; however, four years ago a young man with a backpack full of pesos came along the road. He is a Spaniard, they think. He bought all the birds in the cages, paying muchos pesos (a golden eagle goes for 150,000 pesos) then opened the cage doors and let them go.

The Indians were happy with this arrangement because not only did they get pesos for the birds but they could catch them again and resell them. The young man came for four years. The Indians caught many birds in anticipation of his arrival. The bird market became a primary livelihood because no matter how many birds there were to buy, the Spaniard would reach into his backpack full of pesos, buy them all and set them free.

This year the young man did not come. The Indians did not sell their birds. (Ted thinks he probably got locked up. Maybe even now he's in the instituto de locos). Ted and Elana asked the Indians who they

thought the young man could be.

"Why, Jesus Christ, of course," they replied.

"Why do you think he was Christ?"

"Who else would have so much dinero!"

*Mary Brunette*

## **To See Ourselves as Others See Us—July 4, 1987**

the Pope appeals to Reagan  
end the arms race  
free immense resources  
alleviate the suffering of millions

Reagan replies  
prosperity rests in moral causes  
honesty thrift initiative hard work

honesty  
there are lies, white lies and what the CIA calls grey and black  
propaganda  
grey, a single black lie  
black, a black lie falsely ascribed to another  
the president lives in these shades of dishonesty  
he means only the poor need be honest  
if yr rich it's not necessary

thrift            initiative            hard work  
Juan has enough to buy half a can of Nido\*  
he doesn't know where he'll get the other half  
he saves money by giving his kids water  
(possibly infected with amoebas)  
which brings up initiative  
how much does he have  
being half-sick all the time  
he can't go to the doctor  
he has no money  
no matter how hard he works  
his wages stay the same  
while dairy prices just went up 35 percent



my friend Dan  
California professional  
rent, 1200 per month  
nine room house lives alone  
likes his "space"  
here, a year's wage for a cop  
five children to a bed  
moral? what?

Managua  
kid in Miami Vice T-shirt  
no telling where he got it  
what he sold, traded or did without

the young  
they admire the U.S.  
we could have won them without a shot  
the U.S.  
power progress  
center of things new and exciting  
material possessions beyond compare  
Marta says the gringos must be real smart  
look at their technology  
she should know  
she fought our arms with homemade bombs

the Russian woman asks, "do *all* Americans want war?"  
the Nicaraguans know differently  
they were bled by Somoza  
they know governments rarely represent their people  
they know because U.S. citizens are killed trying to help them  
the gun held to Benjamin Linder's head was made in the U.S.A.

\*powdered milk by Nestle

*Mary Brunette*

## **TET**

**The sixth of February is Tet**

**Somewhere, people are celebrating  
Somewhere, peach blossoms are blooming  
Somewhere, little kumquat trees are embellishing  
a humble hut  
somewhere, children in their best clothes  
are gathering for new year treats  
Somewhere, firecrackers are crackling in merry noise**

**The sixth of February is Tet  
Year of the mighty dragon**

**Somewhere, the dragon awakes and walks its dance  
Somewhere, confetti showers the street  
Somewhere, young ladies in their national dresses  
glance at their young men whispering  
secrets into their best friends' ears  
Somewhere, people passing by each other stop  
and exchange new year wishes  
Somewhere, old ladies hold their grandkids' hands,  
watch the parade go by with smiles**

The sixth of February is Tet

Somewhere, a lonely room has gathered dust  
Somewhere, an old, thin figure stands  
with lonesome shadow  
by a window full of silky cobwebs  
Somewhere, the smell of incense wafts over  
a faded picture  
Somewhere, old memories are being relived  
Somewhere, a mother cries, a father weeps,  
and a lover bows—silently . . .

. . . And here I am thousands of miles away  
wishing, wishing . . . and longing . . .  
and sitting here writing, on the sixth of February

*Quynh Le*

## **A Dutch Lady Seen Through Her Window**

She hovers over her flowers catching  
the bloom of sunlight blending  
into the Cyclamen.

She plucks a withered  
leaf and the care for its passing reflects  
in her farseeing eyes.

Her face, a sculpture in hope, searches  
beneath the yellow  
dead and finds green promise.

Inside her world comes the cry .  
of "Oma!" She turns,  
narcissus still scenting her hair.

*Barbara L. Kimball*

## Making Friends

"It's a rough neighborhood. The boy might get in a fight," my mother said.

"You have to practice to get good at anything," my father commanded. "He has to go outside and play marbles with the other kids."

"And what if one of those big boys picks a fight with him?"

"He'll have to defend himself. He knows that. Don't you?" he turned his head.

"Yes," I answered to this old lecture.

"Good. You can't make any friends staying inside all day."

"What about the fighting?" my mother demanded.

"Don't fight. If someone asks you if you want to fight, say no. Walk away, but don't turn your back on them. Only if you know they're going to hit you, or if they start hitting you, then hit them back. Do whatever you have to do to defend yourself. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"And if the guy is too big or there's too many of them, run away. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"Are you looking for a fight?" he asked.

"No."

"Good. See, he's not looking for any fight."

"He needs to make friends in a better neighborhood. We need to move," my mother explained.

"We don't have the money yet. He can make friends here. Sometimes you can be good friends after a fight. If you win, tell the other guy you want to be friends. It won't hurt. Nobody ever wanted to fight my cousin. If he lost, he would keep coming back till he won. Do you want to go out tomorrow while I'm at work?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to remember what I told you?"

"Yes."

"Good. O.K. Dolores. Let him out tomorrow. I'm going to night school," my father ended the discussion, got up, said his goodbyes and left.

The following day, my mother, after looking to make sure no one else played outside, put me out the door.

The big kid stood there, his eyebrows pulled down close over his eyes, stretching the skin of his forehead. Next to him stood a much

I looked up.

"Hey, get up. My little brother is going to beat you in a race."

absorbed myself more in the use of my thumb to better my aim.

started shooting at the red with the blue cat's eye. With each miss I back. I looked at the marble lying in the circle. Getting on my knees, I comes back?" I asked myself. Several minutes passed. No one came I stood there trying to understand. "Should I go home? What if he

behind clothing hanging to dry.

stomped off toward the far side of the dirt field and disappeared right here. I'm gonna get my little brother and we'll be right back." He right now," he leaned forward and raised his upper lip. "You wait

"I'm twelve. If I wasn't so much older than you, I'd beat you up

"Five."

you?"

"My little brother can beat you running," he yelled. "How old are

told me to only play for fun, not gambling."

"I only have two marbles. I'm just practicing shooting. My father

away from you. So can my little brother."

"Oh," he answered. "I can beat you at marbles and win all yours

"Yes I do. I live right there," I pointed to my door.

"You don't live here."

"I'm Mexican."

"You're not a nigger?"

to answer.

"I'm Mexican," I stood up and answered as my father taught me

"You're a nigger."

"No I'm not."

"I said you're on the wrong side of the railroad tracks."

faced giant in blue jeans silhouetted against the blue sky.

I looked up from the ground and saw a tall, red-haired, freckle-

tracks. You belong on the other side where the niggers live!"

"What are you doing? You're on the wrong side of the railroad

With every miss I struggled to shoot the marble closer to its target.

a red cat's eye in the center and started shooting at it with a blue one.

I got down on my knees in the grey-brown dirt, drew a circle, put

like buildings converted into apartments.

buildings. This grouping made up part of an even larger complex of

dirt field which stood in the center of four, two-story former military

I walked a dozen yards to the right of our door to a large, square

"Stay close by. Stay right here in front," she ordered.

smaller boy with light brown hair, wearing a white T-shirt and blue jeans.

"Come on, get up," the big kid screamed.

"I'm practicing shooting marbles."

"You're scared."

"No, I'm not. I'm shooting marbles," I answered, starting to feel scared when I heard the big kid say the word 'scared.'

"Yes you are. You're even scared to race against someone your own size. Get up or I'll beat you up right now."

I stood up, both scared and defiant. I looked at the door to where I lived, then at the two boys to see what they would do.

"Let's go over there by where we live. The race will start from there," the big brother commanded. "Come on Gil." They walked toward the railroad tracks.

I looked at the door, thought about my mother and running home. Then I thought about what my father said.

"Come on," growled the giant, stopping and looking back.

I followed them to the buildings by the railroad tracks.

"When I say go, you two run down the sidewalk till you get to the fence. Then, turn left and go till you get to the other sidewalk in front of the building. Then, turn left and run till you come to that corner there. Turn left again. First one that gets back here wins," the big kid laid down the rules. "If you cheat, I'm gonna beat you up. You hear me?"

"Yeah," I answered, carefully going over the rules in my mind.

"O.K. line up."

We lined up.

"On your mark . . . get set . . . go."

Gil and I started running. Neck and neck we passed the dirt field. Together we reached the chain link fence that separated the housing projects from the street. We turned left. At the sidewalk in front of the building I lived in, we turned left again. At the opposite end of the building I saw the door to where I lived. A picture of my mother and father, the big kid and Gil flashed in my mind. I thought about running home. Then I realized I wanted to win. I knew I wanted to win and I knew I wanted to make friends. I pushed myself with all I had. I could feel my skin heat up and moisten. I reached the beginning of the next building.

Gil reached the building a second later.

I gasped for breath and forced myself to strain every muscle. I reached the final turn and went left. I saw the big kid at the finishing

line. A quick glance back told me I led the race. I pushed myself with all I had, and finished first.

I felt happy to win. I remembered what my father said and wanted to make friends. "Good race," I gasped.

"What's the matter with you. You let him beat you," the big kid screamed at Gil.

Gil looked with wide eyes at his brother, at me, then back to his brother.

"How could you? You can't let him get away with that. Go over there and beat him up," the big kid ordered Gil.

"No," moaned Gil.

"Go over there and beat him up."

"No."

I stood there watching wide-eyed. I didn't know what was going to happen. This had never happened to me before. I tried to think of what my father said.

"I said go over there. Punch him." The big kid pushed Gil toward me. Gil clenched his fists, raised them, kept coming and started throwing untrained punches.

I saw Gil coming. He closed in on me. I didn't want to get hit. I threw up my clenched fists to defend myself as my father taught me. I blocked Gil's punches and punched back. I landed a straight right to his nose.

Gil stepped back away from me.

I did not pursue him.

"My nose is bleeding," he screamed. "He hit me and made my nose bleed." Tears flowed from his eyes.

I stood there, my eyes open wide.

The big kid ran over and stepped in front of Gil. "Go home. Tell Mom. She'll take care of it. Go ahead. Get moving. I'll be right there." He pushed Gil away. Blood dripped onto Gil's white T-shirt from the hands held over his nose.

The big kid turned. "You hit my little brother and made his nose bleed. Get out of here," he screamed.

"But I want to be friends," I answered.

"You're just a Mexican. Get out. If I ever catch you on this side of the dirt field, I'm gonna beat you up real good. You hear me. You stay off this side of the dirt field." He clenched one fist and pushed with his other hand.

"Yeah," I answered, feeling him push me and seeing his clenched fist terrified me.



"Then get out now. Don't come back."

I turned and walked toward home, watching from the corner of my eye in case he changed his mind and jumped me. As I walked I replayed the pictures in my mind about what happened, over and over again. I reached the dirt field. It looked different. The giant's words rang in my ears, "If I ever catch you on this side . . ."

I knocked at the front door to my home. My mother let me in. "I just got into a fight and he told me not to go past the dirt field." I blurted out.

"What?"

"I just got into a fight and he told me not to go past the dirt field." "I knew it. I knew if you went out . . . you stay home from now on."

"But it wasn't my fault. He . . ."

"Go to your room. Just wait till your father comes home. I have to get dinner ready now. Go."

I went to the room shared with my brother. I lay down on the bed, looked at the pictures in my mind again and waited . . . I heard my father come in the front door. Voices sounded. The door to my room opened.

"Your father said to come out," my mother informed me.

My father, covered with dirt and grease, with one foot in the bathroom, turned and looked. "Wait right there. I have to clean up. I'm in a hurry." He turned, walked into the bathroom, turned again and stuck his head out the door. "What happened?" he asked.

"I got into a fight."

"Did you get hurt?"

"No."

"Did the other guy get hurt?"

"He had a bloody nose."

"Anything else?"

"No."

"Who started it?"

"He did."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Hm. I've got to get cleaned up and go to night school. Be right out. He closed the bathroom door.

He came out and we sat down to eat.

"Now, what happened?" he asked.

I explained the best I could closing with "The big kid told me not to go past the dirt field."

"Why?"

"Because I hit his brother and he said I was just a Mexican."

"Just a Mexican. Where do they live?"

"I don't know."

"We have to move," my mother interrupted.

"We don't have the money yet. How many times do I have to say that. That's why I'm going to night school. I can't work miracles."

"We can live with my sister, in their back room. They're going to move soon. Then we can rent the house. That won't cost any more than here," she insisted.

My father sighed.

"I don't want him going outside till we move," she added.

"He has to go outside. He can't be babied all his life."

"Not past the dirt field he doesn't."

"Oh, all right. But only for now. He has to learn to get along." He turned. "But if they give you any more trouble you better tell me, you hear me?"

"Yes."

"If you find out where they live, let me know. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"And defend yourself."

"Yes."

"And if you get a chance, tell them you want to be friends. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"And if anyone asks, tell them you're proud to be Mexican. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"Can't you make up your mind," my mother interrupted. "Just the other day you called yourself an American."

"I am an American and I also don't like bullsh\*t." He turned his head. "You tell them you're proud to be Mexican. The only thing I can do is tell you what my father told me. I don't have all the answers. I don't have a lot of time to spend with you, and I can't go and solve all your problems. You're going to have to learn to think for yourself. Remember what I told you and do the best you can. That's what he told me and that's what I'm telling you. I work in the day and I'm going to school at night and that's the best I can do right now. I have to go."

He got up from the table, said his goodbyes and left.

That night I lay in bed wondering how to make friends. In the days that followed I met new kids to play with but I never went past the dirt field. I looked for Gil and his brother but never saw them again. We moved not long after. Years later, after the projects had been torn down, I drove by. I wished I could run into those two kids again and see how they were doing. I guess in my own way, I'm still trying to do what my father taught me: go out and make friends, and if need be, keep coming back till the matter is settled.

*Frank Bella Chavez Jr.*

## **Cosby Who?**

Cocaine, heroine, PCP, LSD. All of these I see. Needles hanging from the arms of junkies and the smell of blood, fresh and old run in the cracks of the hardwood floor . . . Stinchin' up the place.

My mom screws anything to get a hit. She sits there in the corner trying to pop a vein in her groin, so she can get her share of what's cookin' in the burnt spoon.

And I sit here wondering if what I see is what I'll be?

There has to be more. Is the Cosby Show real? And If so, Why is my father in the pen doing a dime and a nickle for killin' patty?

Why is my sister pregnant again, already have 5 children she supports through welfare and hustles? Why is my brother pushing dope to my mama and pimpin' girls on the streets of Chicago? Why is my baby sister's brain cooked from crack holding on to my leg for dear life? These are my role models.

And if I leave who will take care of my baby sister? Who will be the runner for my brother's dope deals? Who will babysit for my sister and call the ambulance when my mother has O.D.ed? Who will write my father so he will keep the faith?

My family needs me to help them  
as much as I need them to help me  
realize that Bill Cosby  
will never come to help me.  
So who is Cosby and what the  
Hell does he get off being or thinking  
He is better than me?

*Tracey Anne Burns*

## **For Eleanor:**

My sister,  
All peaches and cream  
Was dating burnt-sugar Banny  
Although my family didn't make much of it  
    (for we believe in Black and White  
    and Reds and Yellows . . . )  
Why, once we accepted some Nigerians over  
    for dinner. It was a Very Big Deal.  
We let them bring salad (searching secretly for  
    Pork-pieces or Bacon-bits before serving)  
In Mom's bright White Kitchen,  
Checkered with tablecloth, napkins, tiled floor, and  
People.  
(Except for sister and boyfriend)  
We were all perfectly polite, just talking  
Clear Blue weather 'n stuff in the  
Sunshine Province of Canada,  
Eating our Sabbath Missionary Dinner:  
    Mixed Greens with  
    Red Swiss steak,  
    Ivory Idaho potatoes,  
    Italian cut beans before  
    German apple kuchen à la mode . . .  
We drove them to church (and later away),  
Crunching Cream-colored communion wafers,  
Tasting purple grape juice in tiny glasses for Jesus  
Who was brown.

*J. G. Moldenbauer*

## Boys' Night Out

I guess there's two ways to look at it—either I'm as “safado” as my mom claims, or people are just plain fulla shit. I mean, this is America, right? “The Great Melting Pot” an' all that noise . . . I guess someone forgot to give it a stir or two.

Well anyway, it started out with me an' my partner getting all slicked up to go to this party a friend of mine was throwin'. We thought we looked pretty cool, right? Homeboy threw on the baggies and Stacey Adams and I did the “Elvis” trip—all black from my leather down to my boots. Hell, we looked tuff, but I guess most everyone else saw it differently.

So we showed up at my buddy's crib and things were goin'—the keg was doin' fine, the music was blarin' an' the hienas were lookin' good enuff. Course, when we first walked in, it was like flies in a sugar bowl. Everyone looked like a bunch of damn choirboys an' prom queens with their lizard sweaters an' stuff, an' here comes the two of us lookin' like we just came from a disco—or maybe they thought it was a jail cell? But we played it off cuz we knew a bunch of people and most of them were pretty cool, so it was no big thing. If some of 'em wanted to sneak their chickenshit looks every now an' then, screw 'em.

We were standin' 'round an' havin' a good time so we cruised over to the keg for 'nuther round. My buddy who threw the party was gettin' finished with the tap, so we all started bull shittin' when some chick I didn't even know came up an' just plain got weird. At first it was cool, but outta nowhere she started goin' off on how she used to hate Mexicans. I mean, we were standin' there totally deadpan, an' she's over here tellin' us she's not prejudiced now, but man she usta think they were lazy, an' dirty, an' drunk an' all that shit. Well, we just played it off, askin' her how come she usta think like that an' what changed her mind an' this an' that, an' meanwhile my buddy's over here tryin' to get her to chill.

“This is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,” he said, emphasising the ‘obvious ethnicity’ of our names, but that chick just kept on flappin' her gums:

"I used to think they were so filthy. I mean, I'd see them all over, and they'd have, like, these disgusting clothes, and, like, a million kids. I swear, they were just so obnoxious, and they'd be saying things in Spanish so I couldn't understand them. I knew they were talking about me; it was so sick. And half of them didn't even have jobs. I think that if they want to stay here, they should learn English or else go back home."

Well, we stood there listenin' to this broad who was "convincing" us she was so cool for not bein' prejudiced anymore, an' we were both thinkin' what the hell was this broad's trip?! She finally split an' we just started bustin' up.

"Damn, that hiena was a trip man!"

I could see my partner was pissed, but we weren't gonna start shit at my buddy's pad, so we just hung out 'til the keg got dusted, an' we said "later" to him an' split for this bar that was close by. We were kinda buzzed, so we figured we'd have a few more rounds an' jam home.

We stumbled in an' it was pretty much like walkin' back into the same bad movie all over again—nothin' but pretty boys an' hueras. Oh well, same shit. We played it cool an' snagged a table after some people split, so we were kickin' back an' drinkin' beer when some white chicks asked if they could share our table. Well, bein' gentlemen an' all, we said "cool" an' they sat down, alright—about as far away from us as possible. They were both pretty good lookin' an' we were scopin' 'em on the sly, but the music was too loud to say anythin' to 'em.

They were playin' it cool, so we started lookin' 'round an' I saw some girls checkin' us out. I told my partner an' I said they were probably scammin', but he said,

"Bullshit, they think they're sly but they been givin' us dirty looks all night; I saw 'em before an' I thought the same thing at first, but I could see 'em talkin' shit."

We both looked over and they turned away real quick. Oh well—screw it. We didn't need that shit from anybody.

We started drinkin' our beers again an' the two hienas were scopin' us so we got 'em to take our picture with the camera my partner'd been carryin' all night. I was feelin' pretty good by now, so I leaned over an' told my partner that I thought one of the girls was



really pretty, and he goes an' tells her that I thought she was beautiful—that bonehead! Well, at least they started talkin' to us—or him anyway. When they both moved a couple of stools over, that's when I got a chance to hear 'em:

"We thought you guys were foreigners or something."

Here we go, I thought.

"Why'd you think that?"

I watched my homeboy an' I could see he was gettin' pissed, but he played it off an' kept the conversation goin'.

"Well, you guys have dark hair and dark eyes—I didn't even think your friend could speak English—and you asked us to take your picture. I mean, no one does that around here."

What the hell, did we have to be tourists or somethin' if we wanted to take some goddamn lousy pictures?! Jeez! I looked over an' I could see that funny little smile on my homeboy's face—it was the kinda smile you get like when you're in a fight an' you're gonna bust somebody's ass wide open.

"So you don't like foreigners?" He kept that smile glued to his face, but he was pissed alright.

"Well, they come here and take away jobs, and they can't even speak English half the time! Pretty soon they're going to own everything!" She paused for a second, wonderin' whether she should ask or not. "You're not from here are you? Cause I can hear you have a slight accent . . ."

"Oh, my family's from New York, that's why people say I have an accent. But my family's been here a long time."

He was playin' 'em along, an' I was sittin' there seein' just how stupid these girls were. They finally left, an' afterwards we just got completely heated. We were both laughin' 'bout it, but he was still pretty keyed up.

"Man, I can't believe that shit. An' it's not like we walked in here wearin' gorras an' huaraches!"

"That's just the way some people are, man." What else could I say, I was more confused than pissed. "This shit never happens to me" is what I was tryin' to convince myself. But I guess I just didn't let it get to me before . . .

We sat there an' got so damn plowed it was pathetic. We finally split at closing time, an' we were laughin' an' makin' fun of all those people who'd kept lookin' at us all night as we staggered home. We hit the pad, an' he passed out soon as he got into his room; I closed the door behind him so he wouldn't get cold. I got to my room an' scattered everything I was wearin' on the floor. I stood there, reelin' drunk outta my mind, an' I just looked at all my black shit lyin' there—the stuff that made me feel good 'bout myself just hours ago—before I flopped down on my bed. It all seemed like one big blur, but before I passed out . . . I knew. Maybe it was the beer, maybe I fooled myself into thinkin' I was playin' it off before—what else was I supposed to do?—but right then I knew.

Man, I wanted to fuckin' kill somebody.

*Jose Jara*

## **Little Secrets**

The secret to our chicken is all in the recipe,  
The secret of how to braid hair is all in the hands,  
The secret of your ignorance is all in your skin,  
yes, you guess it right, you're white.

*Lisa Clavelle*

## Sharecropper

In fields he turns air  
dark with loam.  
Dust of grandfathers  
dry and thick on his boots,  
thick as echos of child cries  
in rafters of the cabin.  
Framed by daylight, hoeing hip  
leaned to one side, morning  
brings in a doorful of memory.  
Rows spread out wet before him  
like the long legs, rich body  
of his black woman.  
Springtimes, he has seeded her.  
Winters, she calls him  
home. Says  
furrow deeper,  
stay.

*Betsy McNeill*

## Passing Thoughts

Sometimes I wonder  
what possesses a Black woman  
who flashes her dark eyes  
through a sullen face  
making a Black man feel disgrace  
at being with  
someone other than  
his own race  
What does she think  
What does she feel  
Is it possible  
that this look of steel  
is more than judgement  
made in haste  
Is her world so small  
we're all  
a threat  
to someone who's been kept  
in a tiny corner of society  
surviving on promises and piety  
I feel for her but I can't reach out  
And I realize I have no clout  
with a woman who's had to share  
with the enemy  
throughout History.

*Rose Calvano*

## **The Universal Language**

El Papá no es popo.  
A Beach is not a Bitch.  
Escondido is not hidden,  
It's the city of my youth.  
¿Tú entiendes? Ellos piden.  
Sure, I'd love to shop!  
The confusion I hear,  
The words I spear,  
All make me mixed with doubt.

But then one day,  
He came my way,  
And whispered these words to me:

Amarillo es yellow.  
Hielo is ice.  
Eyes are ojos . . .  
Y sus ojos son bonitos.

I understood.  
He knew I would.

*Ruth Barnett*

## Banyan Tree

Every morning Baba carries her offering of rice and flowers and lays them at the feet of a banyan tree. It is a large tree, its arms stretch out to meet the horizon; its fingers curl invitingly inwards. No one now alive remembers when it was a sapling. To Baba, it has always been there with its wrinkled, gnarled body shrinking yearly as the sap within its veins dries in imperceptible drops.

It was an old tree when Baba's husband built his home forty years ago. Baba smiles as she tells the story of her fight to keep her tree alive. "You can't cut that tree down," she said when her husband showed her where he planned to build their house. He called her silly but when he found her tied to the tree with one of her saris, he changed his idea of where the house should go. "I think it would be better to put it more in the back of the yard. The tree will be shade from the afternoon sun." Baba nodded approvingly and untied the sari.

The house was built under the shade of the banyan tree. Now the house and tree both stand as they have for all these years. Baba lives alone with a few servants. Her husband died and her children moved away to better jobs in bigger cities. "Come live with me," her oldest son is always saying. "This house is too big for you." Her head shakes "no" emphatically and her son can only shrug. There is no use fighting with Baba. You can't win.

Baba's servants have been pleading with her for years to stop putting milk out for the cobras. To no avail. Everyday, after she has placed her offering to the banyan tree and the day's milk has been delivered, Baba skims the luscious cream from the top of the pail and places it in a saucer. "Only the best should be given away," she said years ago when the cook questioned the use of cream for cobras. Baba takes the saucer and places it outside on the grass by the tree. Cobras come from all around and drink before slithering off under a rock to hide from the noonday heat.

The servants find chores to do inside during the early morning hours and the gardener will work in Baba's yard only in the hot afternoon. The mailman refuses to deliver mail. Years ago, he would unlatch the gate, ride his rickety black bicycle up the long dirt driveway, and place the mail on the porch. Not any more. Not since the day of the cobra scare.

Baba was sitting, as she always does, in her second story window, watching people passing by on the road below. The mailman came earlier than usual this particular day. Baba waved as he got off his bike, unlatched the gate, and after hooking the gate behind him, climbed on his bike again to ride towards the house. Baba watched lazily until she saw the mailman dive off his bike into the grass. Baba couldn't help laughing at the comical sight and, when she had climbed downstairs and out onto the drive, she smiled in spite of herself. The mailman was a crumpled heap, his clothes wrinkled, his hat askew, his shoelaces undone, and his mail scattered across the yard. Between his tears, Baba managed to piece together what had happened. "Coming towards house . . . waving to you . . . in the window . . . as always . . . everyday . . . Oh, my God . . ." He said he had looked down to find his bicycle running over the tail end of a cobra. "A cobra. A cobra." He was hysterical, so Baba patted his shoulder and led him towards the porch. "I was so afraid." He had been afraid the head end would shoot up and strike him, so he jumped from his bike into the grass below. If the mailman hadn't been so hysterical, Baba would have explained what a fool he'd been. If he had kept on riding, he would have been outside the range of the cobra in seconds. In the grass, where he had landed, the cobra's mate could have been waiting, ready to follow her across the path. But Baba held her tongue. People did not try these days to learn about things around them. And even less did they try to learn to live in harmony with them.

So the mailman leaves the mail on the gate now and Baba walks the fifty yards to pick it up. Sometimes there is a letter from one of her children. Once in a while there is a note from a distant relative who lives in her old village, a note filled with news of people Baba used to know. She takes these letters back to her room and reads them as she sits on the window ledge, her very special seat.

From the window, Baba surveys her world. She can look out far past the banyan tree to boundaries where she has never been. In the old days she looked beyond fields of mustard and chili to the distant blue mountains. Now, buildings push up in competition to view these mountains no one can see anymore. A large home crowds Baba both on the left and right, choking the open spaces she had come to love. What had been barely a cowpath outside her gate is now a two lane road. Rickshaws and bullock carts screech and rumble where once ladies meandered on their way to a friend's for tea.

Still Baba sits. It is her place. Has always been her place. And as long as she doesn't look at the ramshackle cottage to the right of her



driveway on what was part of her front lawn, she can preserve the serenity this seat by the window inspires.

Since a thought of the cottage peeked in her mind, she sneaks a glance, only to wish she hadn't. It is an ugly house—small, shoddy, cracked. A year old, it is gray and decrepit, aging like an old man who lost his soul years before his body had ever begun to decay. Not the old of the banyan tree whose age is grace.

The government man had come and told Baba she had too much land. She shouldn't have as much as she has while other people need room for homes. She shook her head, and in her sorrow over her husband's recent death, she couldn't find the words to ask about the grass the cobras needed and the room for flowers to grow and the space Baba herself needed not to feel enclosed and suffocated. But the official man would not have understood. "There is nothing you can do," her son's lawyer had said. "The government has declared an emergency and is confiscating land all over the country."

Baba did not sit in her window for many days while the house was built in her front yard. Her spirit faded and she couldn't eat. But eventually her need to sit at the window and glimpse the horizon was too great. She just refused to see that house. She looked straight ahead instead, to the left part of her yard that was free and where the banyan tree stood solid and bold.

The mailman now came. Baba waved at him from her window and then climbed down from her seat to see what he had left. She was hoping for a letter from her son so she approached the gate with expectation. Instead, there was a large manila envelope with an official stamp. It said that they would come again and take more land and there was nothing she could do.

The surveyors came early one morning when Baba was laying flowers at the feet of the banyan tree. They placed their instruments and mounds of rope on top of the flowers beneath the tree and walked around her yard.

"You're not taking *this* land," she gasped.

"We're only doing what we've been told," they said without interest.

"Not this land. You can have the back yard. Go back there. There is a lot of land. You can have it all, but not this." Her body began to shiver and her words stuttered, "You can't do this."

"This tree will have to go," they said.

"No," she said.

The government men came the next morning to find the banyan tree covered with garlands of flowers. A feast lay on the ground at its feet. And Baba, dressed in her very best, stood straight and still, tied to the tree with a red and gold sari. "You can't cut this tree down," was all she would say. The men stood stunned, not knowing what to do in their typically official way. They tried reason and pleading but nothing would do. A man in charge went away, came back, and said, "We must do it." They untied the red and gold sari, trampling the flowers and the feast in their eagerness to be done with this unpleasant task. Still Baba stood against the tree, her arms outstretched in protection and supplication. "Come now, let's not be silly," the man in charge said. "It is only a tree."

"You can't cut this tree down," was all she'd say.

The men had no choice. With a man on each side, they raised her under her outstretched arms and attempted to carry her off. As soon as they touched her, she began kicking and flailing her arms. "You can't cut down this tree, you can't cut this tree down." The man in charge came up and grabbed her firmly by the shoulders. "Stop. Where is your dignity?" he managed to say.

She looked at him with such contempt and agony that his breath caught as though he had been punched. Then without help, she held her head up high and walked the stairs without a backward glance.

In her room, Baba lay prostrate on her charpoy, listening to the mournful grating of the saw. With each metallic "scritch, scritch" against the wood, Baba's muscles tightened and a tear fell. She lay there as the hammers and saws and men made a house. Each building noise drained her will until her soul was a skeleton of what it had been. But Baba was not a coward. As soon as the noises stopped and Baba knew the men were done, she walked over to the window, sat on her ledge, and stared at the empty face of a concrete wall.

*Elizabeth Singh*

## **Baile**

The great mountain split open  
bones of various ages  
danced in the twilight  
clicked like castanets  
white castanets  
baile, baile

Often I have dreamed  
of jumping from peak to peak  
shaking the bones  
that only I have seen  
dancing in the twilight  
baile, baile

I lie in the grass  
the sun kisses my freckles  
at midday  
My dreams are washed out  
by brightness of bones  
dancing in the twilight  
beating the ground with hard toes  
baile, baile

*Linda Serrato*

## Contributors' Notes

**Ruth Barnett** is an undergraduate Bilingual Liberal Studies major. She loves to write, wants to teach, and wants to teach others to write!

**Mary Brunette** has practiced psychotherapy as a marriage, family and child counselor for the past seventeen years. She recently lived in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where she became known as a poet and storyteller. She has been widely published and is currently working on a book of poems, *Survivors*, which will be published this year.

**Tracey Anne Burns** is majoring in English, with an emphasis on language and literacy. She plans, one day, to teach linguistics at the college level and put an end to the myth about Black English. She is applying to various distinguished graduate schools to become a professional linguist. She has been writing stories, plays, and poetry for 13 years.

**Rose Calvano** sincerely hopes you enjoy "Passing Thoughts," her second publication in *Watershed*.

**Frank Bella Chavez Jr.** is an English major at CSUC. A re-entry EES student, he is an "American of long standing, and his ethnic background is a mixture of Mexican, Filipino, Yaqui, Spanish, French, and all that went into the making of these."

**Lisa Clavelle** is majoring in Black History and minoring in creative writing which she has been doing since age 9. She plans to get a doctorate and teach at SFSU.

**Herman Leon Frazier Jr.** writes, "I alway's loved writing, I started out writing when I was about 12 year's old, I use to write about superman coming to L.A. and having to fight my cousin and his friend's, they all use to laugh at me back then, but now I laugh at them and say: How you like me now. I am an ICST major; my hobbies are D.J.ing parties, and writing."

**Jose Jara** writes, "They say that truth is stranger than fiction, so I guess they mean real life, too. This was a difficult piece for me to write, because I wasn't sure if I wanted to experiment with the persona or narrative style, but it basically came down to the story writing itself the way it was experienced and felt. I'd like to think that after all is said and done, maybe some good did come of this."

**Barbara Kimball** is finishing her Master's Thesis in Creative Writing at CSUC.

**Quynh Le** was born in Vietnam and lived there for half of her life. The other half she spent in Orange County. Since she came to Chico, she has learned to love walking bare-headed in the rain while listening to the trains going by.

**Betsy McNeil** writes, "The most important experiences of my life center around my children, who are of 'mixed' parentage. As a white woman involved in the cultures of people of color, 'Breaking silences' is one of the major things I am concerned with in my writing. The silences around the 'isms,' such as racism, sexism, classism, and agism must be broken now, before we are all silenced by them."

**Rita Urias Mendoza** has published numerous articles and poems on Latino and women's issues. She lives in Southern California and is the mother of five and the grandmother of five. Her daughter works at Chico State.

**Suzanne Lucas Meyer** is a feminist lesbian poet who lives, works, and goes to school in Chico. Suzanne's connections with her grandmother, Avó, and her childhood in Portugal are important to her. Lucas is her grandmother's maiden name and is now Suzanne's middle name.

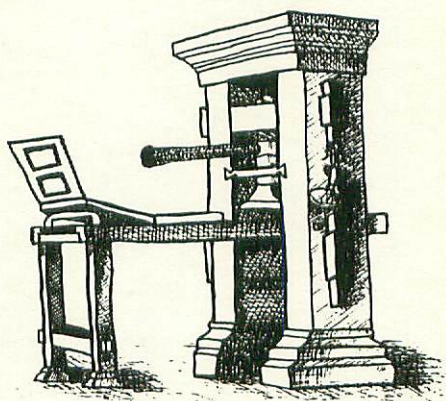
**J. G. (Rita) Moldenhauer** is an English graduate student up-dating her teaching certificate in California. She has taught school in Missouri and private school in Los Angeles. Most recently, she taught French in a private school in Red Bluff, and currently she teaches in Tehama County while completing classes at CSUC.

**Aldrich M. Patterson, Jr.** has a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland in Psychology. Presently Dr. Patterson is a staff psychologist at the CSUC Counseling center, and is an instructor in the Department of Psychology where he teaches cross-cultural counseling. He is a board member of the Institute of Black Enhancement and is the founder of the Afro-American literary prize for poetry and short stories.

**Linda Serrato** is a student at CSUC majoring in Liberal Studies with an emphasis on bilingual education. She has lived in various parts of the Pacific Northwest, and is now living in Chico with her husband and two children.

**Elizabeth Singh** writes "India is alive with sensuous experience—vivid sights, exotic sounds, and rich tastes. But most intriguing of all are India's people." Elizabeth has tried to capture some of this in "Banyan Tree."

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